

AN  
ESSAY  
UPON  
POETRY,

Newly Reprinted:

UPON an occasion of the PREFACE  
TO

VALENTINIAN,  
A

PLAY.

By John Sheffield

1st Duke of

Beaufort

Wherein the Ingenious Author is so unjustly reflected upon, that nothing but his great Quality, could have hindered him from baffling the Satyrift, by Publishing his Name to this Second Edition.

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L O N D O N:

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ESSAYS

UPON

JOSEPH

CONSTITUTION

OF THE

STATE

OF NEW YORK

IN

12,507.

AN  
ESSAY  
UPON  
POETRY.

OF Things in which Mankind does most excell,  
 Nature's chief Master-piece is writing well;  
 And of all sorts of Writing none there are  
 That can the least with Poetry compare;  
 No kind of work requires so nice a touch,  
 And if well done, there's nothing shines so much;  
 But Heav'n forbid we should be so prophane,  
 To grace the vulgar with that sacred name;

'Tis

'Tis not a Flash of Fancy which sometimes  
 Dazzling our Minds, sets off the slightest Rimes;  
 Bright as a blaze, but in a moment done;  
 True Wit is everlasting, like the Sun;  
 Which though sometimes beneath a cloud retir'd,  
 Breaks out again, and is by all admir'd.  
 Number, and Rime, and that harmonious sound,  
 Which never does the Ear with harshness wound,  
 Are necessary, yet but vulgar Arts,  
 For all in vain these superficial parts  
 Contribute to the structure of the whole  
 Without a Genius too, for that's the Soul;  
 A Spirit which inspires the work throughout,  
 As that of Nature moves this World about;  
 A heat that glows in every word that's writ,  
 That's something of Divine, and more than Wit;  
 It self unseen, yet all things by it shown,  
 Describing all men, but describ'd by none;

Where



Where dost thou dwell ? what caverns of the Brain  
 Can such a vast and mighty thing contain ?  
 When I at idle hours in vain thy absence mourn,  
 O where dost thou retire ? and why dost thou return,  
 Sometimes with powerful charms to hurry me away  
 From pleasures of the night, and business of the day ?  
 Ev'n now too far transported I am fain  
 To check thy course, and use the needfull rein ;  
 As all is dullness, when the Fancy's bad,  
 So without Judgment, Fancy is but mad ;  
 And Judgment has a boundless influence ;  
 Not upon words alone, or only sense,  
 But on the world, of manners, and of men,  
 Fancy is but the Feather of the Pen ;  
 Reason is that substantial useful part,  
 Which gains the Head, while t'other wins the Heart

Here

Here I should all the differing kinds rehearse  
 Of Poetry with various sorts of Verse;  
 But who that task can after *Horace* do?  
 That mighty Master and Example too?  
 Echoes at best; all we can say is vain,  
 Dull the design, and fruitless were the pain;  
 'Tis true, the Ancients we may rob with ease,  
 But who with that sad shift himself can please,  
 Without an Actor's pride? a Players Art  
 Is more than his who writes the borrow'd part,  
 Yet modern Laws are made for later Faults;  
 And new Absurdities inspire new thoughts;  
 What need has Satyr then to live on theft,  
 When so much fresh occasion still is left?  
 Folly abounds, nay flourishes at Court,  
 Where on its sphere it finds a kind support;  
 But hold, *White-Hall* has nothing now to fear,  
 'Tis Wit and Sence that is the Subject here.

Defects

Defects of witty Men deserve a Cure,  
And those who are so, will the worst endure.

First then of *Songs*, that now so much abound,  
Without his Song no Fop is to be found,  
A most offensive Weapon which he draws,  
On all he meets, against *Apollo's* Laws :  
Though nothing seems more easy, yet no part  
Of Poetry requires a nicer Art;  
For as in rows of richest Pearl there lyes  
Many a blemish that escapes our Eyes,  
The least of which Defects is plainly shewn  
In some small Ring, and brings the value down ;  
So Songs should be to just perfection wrought,  
Yet where can we see one without a fault ;  
Exact propriety of words and thought ?  
Th' expression easy, and the fancy high,  
Yet that not seem to creep, nor this to fly ;

No.

No words transpos'd, but in such just cadance,  
 As, though hard wrought, may seem the effect of chance;  
 Here, as in all things else, is most unfit  
 Bawdry barefac'd, that poor pretence to Wit;  
 Such nauseous Songs as the late Convert made,  
 Which justly call this censure on his Shade;  
 Not that warm thoughts of the transporting joy,  
 Can shock the Chastest, or the Nicest cloy;  
 But obscene words, too gross to move desire,  
 Like heaps of Fuel do but choak the Fire.  
 That Author's Name has undeserved praise,  
 Who pall'd the appetite he meant to raise.

Next, *Elegie*, of sweet but solemn voice,  
 And of a Subject grave, exacts the choice,  
 The Praise of Beauty, Valour, Wit contains,  
 And there too oft despairing Love complains.

In vain alas, for who by Wit is moved?  
 That Phoenix she deserves to be beloved.  
 But Noisy Nonsense, and such Fops as vex  
 Mankind, take most with that fantastick Sex.  
 This to the praise of those who better know,  
 The many raise the value of the few.  
 But here, as I too oft alas have tryed,  
 Women have drawn my wandering thoughts aside.  
 Their greatest fault, who in this kind have writ,  
 Is neither want of words, nor dearth of wit;  
 But though this Muse harmonious numbers yield,  
 And every Couplet be with fancy fill'd,  
 If yet a just coherence be not made  
 Between each thought, and the whole modelayd  
 So right, that every step may higher rise,  
 As in a Ladder, till it reach the Skies;  
 Trifles like these perhaps of late have past,  
 And may be lik'd awhile, but never last;

B

'Tis

'Tis Epigram, 'tis Point, 'tis what you will,  
But not an Elegie, nor writ with skill,

\* *Waller.* No \* *Panegyrick*, nor a *Coopers-Hill*.

A higher flight and of a happier force  
Are *Odes*, the Muses most unruly Horse;  
That bounds so fierce, the Rider has no rest,  
But foams at mouth, and speaks like one possest.  
The Poet here must be indeed Inspired,  
And not with fancy, but with fury fired.  
*Cowley* might boast to have perform'd this part,  
Had he with Nature joyn'd the rules of Art :  
But ill expression gives too great Allay  
To that rich Fancy, which can ne're decay.  
Though all appears in heat and fury done,  
The Language still must soft and easy run.  
These Laws may seem a little too severe,  
But Judgment yields, and Fancy governs there ;

Which



Which, though extravagant, this Muse allows,  
And makes the work much easier than it shews.

Of all the ways that Wifest Men could find  
To mend the Age, and mortify Mankind,  
*Satyr* well writ has most successful prov'd,  
And cures, because the remedy is lov'd.  
'Tis hard to write on such a Subject more,  
Without repeating things said oft before.  
Some vulgar Errors only Lets remove  
That stain this Beauty, which we chiefly love.  
Of well-chose words some take not care enough,  
And think they may be as the Subject rough.  
This great work must be more exactly made,  
And sharpest thoughts in smoothest words convey'd:  
Some think if sharp enough, they cannot fail,  
As if their only business was to rail;

B 2

But

But 'tis mens *Foibles* nicely to unfold,  
 Which makes a Satyr differ from a Scold.  
 Rage you must hide, and prejudice lay down,  
 A Satyr's Smile is sharper than his Frown.  
 So while you seem to scorn some Rival Youth,  
 Malice it self may pass sometimes for Truth.  
 The Laureat here may justly claim our praise,  
 Crown'd by *Mac-Fleckno* with immortal Bays ;  
 Though prais'd and punish'd for another's Rimes,  
 His own deserve that glorious fate sometimes ;  
 Were he not forc'd to carry now dead weight,  
 Rid by some Lumpish Minister of State..

Here rest my Muse, suspend thy cares awhile,  
 A greater Enterprize attends thy toil ;  
 And as some Eagle that intends to fly  
 A long and tedious Journey through the Sky,

Considers

Considers first the perils of her case,  
 Over what Lands and Seas she is to pass ;  
 Doubts her own strength so far, and justly fears  
 That lofty Road of Airy Travellers ;  
 But yet incited by some great design,  
 That does her hopes beyond her fears incline,  
 Prunes every feather, views her self with care,  
 Then on a sudden flounces in the Air.  
 Away she flies so strong, so high, so fast,  
 She lessens to us, and is lost at last.  
 So greater things my Muse prepares to sing,  
 Things that will Malice, and may Envy bring;  
 Yet why should Truth offend, when only told  
 T' inform the Ignorant, and warn the Bold ?  
 On then my Muse, adventrously engage  
 To give Instructions that concern the Stage.

The

The *Unites* of Action, Time, and Place,  
 Which, if observed, give Plays so great a grace,  
 Are, though but little practis'd, too well known  
 To be taught here, where we pretend alone  
 From nicer faults to purge the present Age,  
 Less obvious Errors of the *English* Stage.

First then, *Soliloques* had need be few  
 Extreemly short, and spoke in passion too.  
 Our Lovers talking to themselves, for want  
 Of others, make the Pit their Confidant;  
 Nor is the matter mended much, if thus  
 They trust a friend only to tell it us.  
 Th' occasion should as naturally fall,  
 As when *Bellarion* confesses all.

*Figures of Speech*, which Poets think so fine,  
 Art's needless Varnish to make Nature shine,

Are

Are all but Paint upon a beauteous Face,  
 And in Descriptions only claim a place.  
 But to make Rage declame, and Grief discourse,  
 From Lovers in despair fine things to force,  
 Must needs succeed, for who can chuse but pity  
 To see poor Hero's miserably witty ?  
 But O the Dialogues, where jest and mock  
 Is held up like a rest at Shittle-cock !  
 Or else like Bells eternally they Chime,  
 Men dye in Simile, and live in Rime.  
 What things are these, who would be Poets thought,  
 By Nature not inspir'd, nor Learning taught ?  
 Some Wit they have, and therefore may deserve  
 A better way than this by which they starve :  
 But to write Plays ? why 'tis a bold pretence,  
 To Language, Breeding, Fancy and good Sense ;  
 Nay more, for they must look within to find  
 Those secret turns of Nature in the mind.

Without

Without this part in vain would be the whole,  
 And but a Body all without a Soul :  
 All this together yet is but a part  
 Of Dialogue, that great and powerful Art,  
 Now almost lost, which the old *Grecians* knew,  
 From whence the *Romans* fainter Copies drew, }  
 Scarce comprehended since but by a few.  
*Plato* and *Lucian* are the best Remains  
 Of all the wonders which this art contains ;  
 Yet to our selves we Justice must allow,  
*Shakespear* and *Fletcher* are the wonders now :  
 Consider them, and read them o're and o're,  
 Go see them play'd, then read them as before.  
 For though in many things they grossly fail,  
 Over our Passions still they so prevail,  
 That our own grief by theirs is rockt asleep,  
 The dull are forc'd to feel, the wise to weep.

There



Their Beauties Imitate, avoid their faults ;  
 First on a Plot employ thy carefull thoughts,  
 Turn it with time a thousand several waies,  
 This oft alone has given success to Plays ;  
 Reject that vulgar error which appears  
 So fair, of making perfect characters,  
 There's no such thing in Nature, and you'll draw  
 A faultless Monster which the world ne're saw.  
 Some faults must be, that his misfortunes drew,  
 But such as may deserve compassion too.  
 Besides the main Design compos'd with Art,  
 Each moving Scene must be a Plot a part,  
 Contrive each little turn, mark every place,  
 As Painters first chalk out the future face,  
 Yet be not fondly your own slave for this,  
 But change hereafter what appears amiss.  
 Think not so much where shining thoughts to place,  
 As what a man would say in such a case.

C

Neither

Neither in Comedy will this suffice,  
 The Actor too must be before your eyes,  
 And though 'tis Drudgery to stoop so low,  
 To him you must your utmost meaning show.  
 Expose no single Fop, but lay the load  
 More equally, and spread the Folly broad;  
 The other way's too common, oft we see  
 A fool derided by as bad as he;  
 Hawks fly at nobler game, but in his way,  
 A very Owl may prove a Bird of prey;  
 Some Poets so will one poor Fop devour;  
 But to Collect, like Bees from every flower,  
 Ingredients to compose that precious juice,  
 Which serves the world for pleasure and for use,  
 In spite of faction this will favour get,  
 But *Falstaff* seems unimitable yet.

Another fault which often does befall,  
 Is when the wit of some great Poet shall  
 So overflow, that is, be none at all,

That

That all his Fools speak sence, as if posselt,  
 And each by Inspiration breaks his jest;  
 If once the Justness of each part be lost,  
 Well we may laugh, but at the *Poets* cost:  
 That silly thing men call sheer Wit avoid,  
 With which our Age so nauseously is cloy'd,  
 Humour is all, and 'tis the top of wit,  
 T' express agreeably a thing that's fit.  
 But since the *Poets* we of late have known,  
 Shine in no dress so well as in their own,  
 The better by example to convince,  
 Lets cast a view on this wrong side of sence.

First a Solloquie is calmly made,  
 Where every reason is most nicely weigh'd,  
 At the end of which most opportunely comes  
 Some Hero frighted at the noise of Drums

For her dear sake, whom at first sight he loves,  
 And all in Metaphor his passion proves;  
 But some sad accident, that's yet unknown,  
 Parting this pair, to leave the man alone,  
 He's Jealous presently, we know not why,  
 Then, to oblige his Rival needs must dy;  
 But first he makes a Speech, wherein he tells  
 The absent Nymph how much his flame excels,  
 And yet bequeaths her generously now  
 To that dear Rival whom he does not know,  
 Who coming in, sent sure by Fate's command,  
 Too late alas withholds his hasty hand,  
 Which now has given that most lamented stroke,  
 At which this very Stranger's heart is broke;  
 Who more to his new friend than Mistress kind,  
 Mourns the sad Fate of being left behind,  
 Most naturally prefers those dying Charms  
 To Love, and living in his Ladyes Arms.

How

How shamefull, and what monstrous things are these ?  
 And then they rail at th' Age they cannot please,  
 Conclude us only partial for the dead,  
 And grudge the Sign of old *Ben. Johnson's* head.  
 When the Intrinsick value of the Stage  
 Can scarce be judg'd, but by the following Age ;  
 For Dances, Flutes, *Italian* Songs, and rime  
 May keep up sinking Nonsense for a time,  
 But that will fail, which now so much o're rules,  
 And sence no longer will submit to fools.

By painfull steps we are at last got up  
*Pernassus* hill, upon whose Airy top  
 The *Epick* Poets so divinely show,  
 And with just pride behold the rest below.  
 Heroick Poems have a just pretence  
 To be the chief effort of humane sence,



work of such inestimable worth,  
 There are but two the world has yet brought forth,  
*Homer* and *Virgil* : with what awfull sound  
 Each of those names the trembling Air does wound :  
 Just as a Changeling seems below the rest  
 Of men, or rather is a two legg'd beast,  
 So those Gigantick souls amaz'd we find  
 As much above the rest of humane kind.  
 Nature's whole strength united ; endless fame,  
 And universal shouts attend their name.  
 Read *Homer* once, and you can read no more,  
 For all things else will seem so dull and poor,  
 You'll wish't unread ; but oft upon him look,  
 And you will hardly need another book ;  
 Had *Bossu* never writ, the world had still  
 Like *Indians* view'd this wondrous piece of Skill,  
 As something of Divine the work admired,  
 Hoped not to be Instructed, but Inspired ;

Till



Till he disclosing sacred Mysteries,  
 Has shewn where all the mighty Magick lies,  
 Describ'd the Seeds, and in what order sown,  
 That have to such a vast proportion grown.  
 Sure from some Angel he the secret knew,  
 Who through this Labyrinth has given the clue.  
 But what alas avails it poor Mankind  
 To see this promised Land, yet stay behind?  
 The way is shewn, but who has strength to go?  
 Who can all Sciences exactly know?  
 Whose fancy flies beyond weak reason's sight,  
 And yet has Judgment to direct it right?  
 Whose nice distinction, *Virgil*-like, is such,  
 Never to say too little nor too much?  
 Let such a man begin without delay,  
 But he must do much more than I can say,  
 Must above *Cowley*, nay and *Milton* too prevail,  
 Succeed where great *Torquato*, and our greater *Spencer* fail.

F I N I S.



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Royal Highness, at the Black Bull in Cornhil.

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